

Redefining the Economic Status of Women in Developing Nations: Gender Perspective

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Abstract: Economic status of women is one of the most important criteria for estimating with precision the degree of the women development of a particular country in various periods of history. It is generally accepted that a change in the economic status of women is a good indicator of development of women as well as development of nation. In the present paper the word 'Economic Status of Women' has been used in terms of aggregate of Material Economic Status and Abstract Economic Status. In the present study the Economic Status of Women of different caste groups, is viewed by considering its relationship with Income Level of the family (ascriptive status / man achieved status) and Level of Exposure (achieved status/ women achieved status) respectively. The study finds that the parameters which are taken under the variable, Level of Exposure of Woman, presents the true and achieved status of the women of the different caste groups irrespective of the high level of family Income. Regression test is used to analysis the results.

Index Terms: Economic Status of Women, Material Economic Status of Women, Abstract Economic status of women, Level of Exposure

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian society from the very beginning has been a dynamic one and has seldom spurned spontaneous changes from outside. It is however, generally accepted that a change in the economic status of women is a good indicator of development of women as well as development of nation.

D. Radha Devi (1993) in her study 'Status of Women in India, a Comparison by State' finds that there is direct relationship between status and development; many of the status indicators are reflections of overall development. Hence, these States (14 States having a population of 10 million or more) need special attention in order to raise them up to the level of the other States in terms of development.

It is found that social status generally coincides with economic status. In other words both are more or less overlapping. In simple terms, a theoretical definition of women's status could be the ranking, in terms of prestige, power or esteem, accorded to the position of women in comparison with or relative to 'ranking', also in terms of prestige, power or esteem give to the position of men. [Sudhir Verma 1991]

Thus women's status is a multidimensional entity. The various components of status may move in different directions in a given time period, so that defining what constitutes 'improvement' or otherwise, is a difficult task. Women's status can be conceptualized at aggregate and individual levels. There may be difference in how a variable behaves when considered at the different levels.

As each status/position in a particular structure can be viewed in terms of superiority and inferiority (that is, in terms of power, privileges, advantages and disadvantages), the notion of status involves comparisons and grading. There can be self perceived status, group perceived status or objective status (Mukerjee 1975), a situation which can lead to status inconsistency when a person is very high in one type of status and very low in another. Therefore status must be viewed in its relative context. There exists not only a status distinction between men and women but also a status hierarchy among women themselves.

Coming to women's economic status, the status of women is intimately connected with their economic position, which, in turn, depends upon rights, roles and opportunities for their participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development. However, all developments do not result in improving women's economic activities. Patterns of women's activities are affected by prevailing social ideology and differ according to the stage of economic development. Desai (1987), Majumdar (1978), Blood and Wolfe (1960) argued that economic contribution by itself is not enough for women to have an equal status. They must have control over the means of production and should have opportunities for equal participation in family and community decision-making.

According to Savita Thakur Joshi (1999) there are broadly two sets of variables, which help an individual to occupy a particular social and economic position. One set of variable is called 'ascriptive' which include caste, kinship network of relationships, familial occupations, income etc. Another set is labeled as 'achieved' which an individual attains or acquires, according to his or her own efforts like education, occupational skills, economic returns etc. In addition to these two sets of variables an individual's life experiences also influence his/her attitude and behavior pattern. Scholars have tried to understand the status of women in India by taking into account different variables.

Supporting the above statement an Economics Status can be defined in terms of both Abstract Economic Status and Material Economic Status. Abstract Economic Status denotes position vis-à-vis others in terms of economic independence and equality. Material Economic Status denotes relative position in terms of assets, saving, indebtedness, income, consumption pattern etc. In the present paper the word 'Economic Status of Women' has been used in terms of aggregate of Material Economic Status and Abstract Economic Status.

In Indian social institutions, the place of caste system is the most important. In earlier days caste system had existed as a main system of social stratification in India. If one thinks about the importance of caste in India, a political scientist wrote in Reader's Digest in 1950 that "Caste is in Indian blood!" which is one of the most important social institutions and almost all activities economic, political, educational and socio-cultural revolve around the notion of caste. Davis (1973) analysis 'India is home to diverse group of people characterized by different languages, customs, traditions, religions, and life style of habits. Virtually each state has its own culture, which is very much important in studying any aspect of this society including status of women.'

Thus in the present paper the Economic Status of Women of different caste groups, is viewed by considering its relationship with Income Level of the family (ascriptive status / man achieved status) and Level of Exposure (achieved status/ women achieved status) respectively.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study was based on two types of data, namely, primary and secondary. The major source of primary data obtained through interviews, which was based on pretested and carefully prepared questionnaire. The secondary data obtained from various departments and institutes. The other sources of secondary data were obtained from published and unpublished material, books, reports and reputed journals from different resources. In this study, 450 women were taken as respondents. For the purpose of this study, caste has been classified into three major groups:

Upper caste: Brahmin, Rajputs, Baniyas, Kayasthas, Jains etc.

Intermediate caste: Ahirs, Sunars, Kurmi, Yadavs, etc.

Lower Caste: Disadvantaged Castes like Bhangi, Pasi, the caste system also prevails in different brand of tribes, like, Santhals, Bhils, Meena, Gonds, Nundas, Nagas, Khasis, Rans, Goros, etc.

150 respondents were taken from each group, with the help of judgment or purposive sampling method. They equally represent the rural and urban area of the Ajmer District of Rajasthan.

III. RESULT ANALYSES

3.1 Economic Status

In the present study the word 'Economic Status' has been used in terms of aggregate of Material Economic Status (MES) and Abstract Economic Status (AES).

Economic Status (TES) = MES + AES

Where:

MES = Family Income level + Ownership of Land and House + Possession of Vehicle + Telephone Usage + Loan facility availed + Investments made + Savings + Employment Status.

AES = Headship of the family + Economic Decision-making Power + Non- Economic Decision-making Power + Sharing of household responsibilities + Distribution of Personal Income.

After considering all the elements of MES and AES, they are coded. Economic Status (TES) measured by adding both the dimensions, MES and AES. TES of the respondents is assumed to be distributed normally. So the TES of the respondents are divided in to three categories, below average, average, above average levels. The lower and upper limits of average level have been calculated on the formula

The lower limit of average level = $M - 1\sigma$ The upper limit of average level = $M + 1\sigma$
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Source: Dr. A.B. Bhatnagar and Dr. (Mrs.) Meenakshi Bhatnagar (1992);
 Measurement and Evaluation', P. 116-120.

Table 1 and figure-a brings out that in the survey maximum respondents 68.9% score Medium TES. Only 15.1% respondents come in Low and 16.0% respondents have High TES.

3.2 Level of exposure

Level of exposure is one of the significant factors influencing economic status of women of different castes. The greater social interaction as a result of economic involvement and training may lead to an increase in level of exposure and self confidence. Literacy (in broad sense of learning) and level of exposure are complementary to each other which is indicated in the study of U. Lalitha Devi. Literacy efforts make an individual more functional and increase her understanding which eventually widens the sphere of exposure. According to U Lalitha Devi when education and economic freedom came together, they activated one of the basic wishes of an individual – wish for recognition, i.e. status, It has to be cautioned that economic freedom (Independence) does not obtain if a person has high income and can spend freely. It also requires an awareness of opportunities and alternative uses for one’s resources, which will enable a judicious distribution of ones resources on the various wants to maximize their utility. These can come only to an educated person who spends considerable part of his/her time outside home and who has opportunities of interaction with a wide and varied set of situation outside of one’s home.

A Number of empirical studies conducted in different parts of India on women’s economic status and level of exposure supports the conclusion that introduction of new technology, mechanization, industrialization, the spread of education and the development of transport, means of communication, medical facilities and other rural upliftment activities have increased women’s knowledge, awareness and participation in different activities. Thus, the economic status of women has improved due to their increased level of exposure.

3.2.1 Level of Exposure

The aggregate level of exposure of each respondent is measured in terms of awareness of local problems, participation in women development programmes, participation in the local bodies, familiarity of public services, reading newspaper, use of media and political activeness etc.

All constituents of level of exposure are coded. Level of exposure of the respondents is assumed to be distributed normally. So three categories have been formed as per aggregate level of exposure of the respondents: Low (below average), Medium (average) and High (above average).

The table 2 and figure b reveals that 67.8% respondents have Medium level of exposure and 15.3% respondents have High level of exposure.

3.2.2 Caste and Level of Exposure

Table 3 shows the level of exposure of the respondents of different castes. The respondents of Low level of exposure are maximum (39.5%) in high caste where as minimum (25.0%) in lower caste. Respondents of High level of exposure are maximum (56.5%) in high caste and minimum (17.4%) in middle caste.

3.2.3 Regression Test

Regression coefficient of Three Castes		
Type	Significance value	Regression coefficient
1. Relationship among High Caste, Economic Status of Women and Level of Exposure	0.000	0.304

2. Relationship among Middle Caste, Economic Status of Women and Level of Exposure	0.055	0.155
3. Relationship among Lower Caste, Economic Status of Women and Level of Exposure	0.004	0.226

Thus, it can be concluded that:

- There is relationship between level of exposure and economic status of women in every caste group.
- The effect of level of exposure in raising the economic status of women is maximum in high caste (as $b = 0.304$) followed by lower caste ($b=0.226$) and middle caste ($b=0.155$) respectively.
- This finding supports that the level of exposure is playing significant role in relation to economic status of women and caste.

An interesting observation coming out of this intensive study is middle caste women acquires lowest position in terms of level of exposure. Basically the variables, through which the level of exposure is measured, are related to general awareness of society and oneself. In this reference education is directly or indirectly connected to level of exposure because it is assumed that education develops the personality and rationality of individuals. In the high caste respondents who have High economic status have corresponding high scores in literacy level as well as level of exposure. As the study reveals that high caste has highest literacy rate (82%). Illiteracy is maximum (45.5%) in middle caste. Middle caste acquires the lowest position in terms of level of exposure because in this caste not only literacy level is low but also traditional bias is greater than any other caste group.

IV. INCOME LEVEL

Income level is also one of the influencing factors of economic status of women. Income level can be viewed in two sense firstly, family's income level and secondly, her personal income level. Finally personal income contributes to family income level.

In the present research paper family income level is concerned, as all respondents are not employed. This study tries to explore the relationship among economic status of women, caste and income level.

4.0.1 Income Level

In this paper the income levels of the respondents are classified into five levels of income: below 1500 (Lower level), 1501 – 5000 (Lower middle level), 5001 – 10000 (Middle level), 10001 – 20000 and 20000 & above (High income level).

Table 4 reveals that from total respondents 8.9% respondents belong to below –1500 income level. The highest percentage 59.0 of the respondents falls in 1501-5,000 income level.

4.0.2 Caste and Income Level

The table 5 presents prevailing income levels among different caste groups. As the table shows that respondents of below -1500 income level are maximum (80.0%) of lower caste. Respondents of (1501-5000) income level are maximum (44.1%) of middle caste. More than half of the total respondents of (5,000-10,000) income level belong to high caste. More than 75% respondents of the (10,000-20,000) and (20000 & above) income levels belong to high caste, (86.5%) and (95.7%) respectively. Thus, it can be concluded that the lowest income level is dominating in lower caste and the highest income level is dominating in high caste.

4.0.3 Regression Test

Regression coefficient of Three Castes

Type	Significance value	Regression coefficient
1. Relationship among High Caste, Economic Status of Women and Income Level	0.000	6.079

2. Relationship among Middle Caste, Economic Status of Women and Income Level	0.008	5.169
3. Relationship among Lower Caste, Economic Status of Women and Income Level	0.020	4.681

So it can be summarized that:

- There is relationship between income level and economic status of women in every caste group.
- The effect of income level in raising the economic status of women is maximum in high caste (as $b=6.079$) followed by Middle Caste ($b=5.169$) and Lower caste ($b=4.681$).
- The above findings suggest that income level is playing very significant role in relation to economic status of women and caste.

Thus there is direct relationship between family Income Level and Economic Status of women of different caste groups. But in the developing nation such as India it does not present the true picture of Women Economic Status. Level of Exposure presents more reliable parameter to measure the position of Women Economic Status of different caste groups.

APPENDIX

TES	Frequency	Percentage
Low (Below 56)	68	15.1
Medium (56-84)	310	68.9
High (Above 84)	72	16.0
Total	450	100.0

Table-1Economic Status (TES)

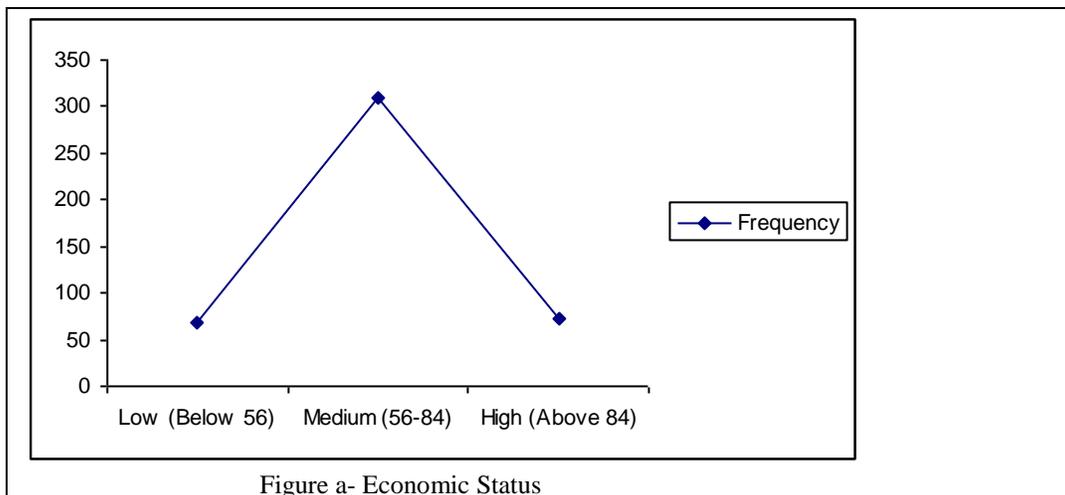


Figure a- Economic Status

Mean value: 70.1533
Std. Deviation: 14.0180

Table 2

Aggregate Level of Exposure of the Respondents

Level of Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Low (Below 62)	76	16.9
Medium (62 to 98)	305	67.8
High (Above 98)	69	15.3
Total	450	100.0

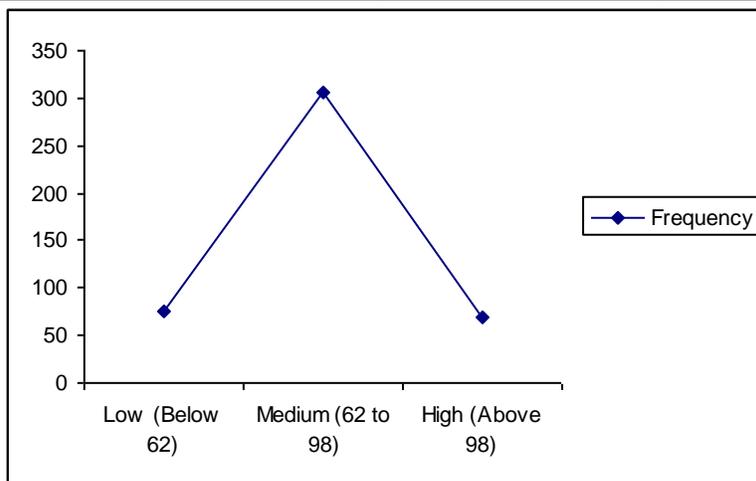


Figure b: Aggregate Level of Exposure of the Respondents

* *Mean Value* = 80.0333

* *Std. Deviation* = 17.9057

Caste	Level of Exposure		
	Low	Medium	High
High Caste	30 (39.5%)	81 (26.6%)	39 (56.5%)
Middle Caste	27 (35.5%)	111 (36.4%)	12 (17.4%)
Lower Caste	19 (25.0%)	113 (37.0%)	18 (26.1%)
Total	76 (100.0%)	305 (100.0%)	69 (100.0%)

Table 3-Caste and Level of Exposure

Income Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Below 1500	40	8.9
1,501 -5,000	261	59.0
5,001 - 10,000	74	16.4
10,001- 20,000	52	11.6
20,001 and above	23	5.1
Total	450	100.0

Table 4-Income Levels of the Respondents

Caste	Income Levels				
	Below-1500	1501-5000	5001-10000	10001-20000	20000 & above
High Caste	2 (5.0%)	40 (15.3%)	41 (55.4%)	45 (86.5%)	22 (95.7%)
Middle Caste	6 (15.0%)	115 (44.1%)	23 (31.1%)	6 (11.5%)	- -
Lower Caste	32 (80.0%)	106 (40.6%)	10 (13.5%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (4.3%)
Total	40 (100%)	261 (100%)	74 (100%)	52 (100%)	23 (100%)

Table 5 -Caste and Income Level

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